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SOM

FREE REFLECTIONS

Upon Occasion of the

PUBLIC DISCOURSE

ABOUT

Liberty of Conscience,

And the Consequences therof in this present Conjuncture.

In a Letter to a Friend.

By one who cordially imbraces whatsoever there is of tru Religion in al *Professions*, and hates every thing which makes any of them hate or hurt one another.

Licenced *August* the 11*th*. 1687.

LONDON,

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SOM

Free Reflections,

&c.

Dear SIR,

THE Information you gave me upon my firſt arrival here of the great Ferment that is now raiſed in mens mindes by the Kings late Declaration for *Liberty of Conſcience*; and the Counſel you were pleaſed to giv me therupon for my own Conduct, that I ſhould be cautious in aſſerting any Opinions contrary to the currant Stream of the Times; This Information, and this Counſel, I ſay, were ſo Prudent and ſo Friendly that I acknowledg my ſelf obliged to you for them, and therfore I now return you my hearty thanks. I know not how you came to imagin that ſuch a precaution was neceſſary for me, who have been ſo long a Stranger to my own Country, and by conſequence, who am not much wedded to any of thoſe particular Factions, that have this long while miſerably divided it. But I muſt confeſs to you, that ſo it is. The News I had heard of that Declaration abroad, had been ſo pleaſing to me, as ſeeming the only poſſible Cure for thoſe unhappy diviſions, that without your previous advice I ſhould have been aſtoniſhed at the diſlike I have heard expreſt of it by many of my beſt Friends; and

perhaps not able therupon to refrain from oppoſing them, ſo directly as might have loſt me their Eſteem and Friendſhip which I am very deſirous to conſerv. Wel; it is to you then that I ow the obligation of ſome prudent reſervedneſs, which I have yet maintained in all occaſions of converſe about public Concerns, during theſe eight or ten Days that I have been here: And it is to you therfore that I am now reſolved to addreſs my ſelf for further directions. Such a reſervedneſs has indeed in it a Prudence which ſelf Intereſt wil always exhort unto: But when the matter is of public and great concernment, ſo narrow a confinement ſeems unſuitable to the generous Principle of univerſal Charity, wfiich the Chriſtian Religion inſites us unto. That Principle, you know, is apt to move me when occaſions ſeem to require it. And therfore that I may not er in my general aim of contributing towards the public good, I deſire you to weigh with me thoſe Conſiderations which have rendred the proſpect of a general Liberty of Conſcience ſo pleaſing to me; that I may, upon your better advice, either propagate or ſtifle them, as ſhal appear moſt conſonant to my Duty.

The thing in it ſelf is ſo agreeable to the nature of Mankind, and to the particular Laws of the truly Primitive Chriſtian Religion, that it is much to be wondered how ſo ſociable a Creature as Man is, and ſo meek a Creature as a Chriſtian ought to be, ſhould have ever infringed ſuch an excellent Rule. Can any thing be more reaſonable than for every man to allow unto another that Liberty which he deſires for himſelf? Can any thing be more peaceable than that Principle, which, allowing ſuch a Liberty, dos therby take away the occaſion of bittereſt Contention? The very Light of Nature directed *the Wiſe Heathens* unto it, during ſom Thouſands of Years; inſomuch that whatever other Differences hapned among them, upon account of civil Intereſt, their Societies were

were never disturbed by the disagreement of their Conceptions in matters of Religious Speculation. *The Jews*, who had greater reason than any other Nation to set a high valu upon their own Law, as having received it by an extraordinary Ministration, yet nevertheless attempted not to force any one to a compliance therwithal, who lay not under the same Conviction as themselves. *The Primitive Christians*, who reasonably may be supposed to have had the truest sense of their great Master's Instructions, were so far from inculcating any Principles of Persecution, that they exclaimed against the practice of it, as the greatest mark of that *Antichristianism* which had been fore-told them was to spring up in the World. The Arguments with which this Principle of *Liberty*, or *Toleration*, has been defended ar many and strong. But it would be very superfluous in me to insist upon them unto you, who have seen and heard them repeated of late Years in a thousand Forms, and who I know ar your self convinced of the natural equitableness of the thing, notwithstanding al the inconveniencys that you have represented to me in its practice. I wil therfore ad only one reason for it, which seems to me invincible, and then pass to the consideration of those inconveniencys, which is my main design.

I say then that the establishing of any Religious Perswasion by Force is *unreasonable*, because indeed it is *impossible*. The Minde of man is not capable of receiving any conviction but either by sensible proof, or rational demonstration. Blows and Torments may force an outward Complyance, bnt they cannot work any change in the Heart; and therfore, neither can any such forced complyance be acceptable to God, because 'tis only the Heart that he looks after. Thus then it is evident that al the effect of any forcible Imposition in Religion, in those that ar so forced, can be nothing but Hypocrisie; and consequently that nothing can be more unjust,

nor

nor more ridiculouſly abſurd than to attempt the eſtabliſhment of any Religion by ſuch like means. Let it pe therfore concluded between you and me, as I know it is, that no man has right to impoſe upon another in matters purely Religious; Which is to ſay, That every man has right in thoſe matters to enjoy his own Liberty. And now let us examine what Advantages or Inconveniencys may ariſe from that Liberty in the preſent Conjuncture of Affairs in *England*; and conſequently, whether a Prudent and an Honeſt man ought ſincerely to wiſh for it, and contribute unto it, in ſuch opportunities as Providence puts into his hands, or no. That is the very Queſtion which now concerns me, and therfore I wil endeavor to lay it before you as plainly and as impartially as I can.

The Liberty of Conſcience now aimed at in *England*, in the ordinary Diſcourſe of People, implys no leſs than the change of our Laws; and that eſpecially in thoſe two important Heads, the *Penalties* imcumbent upon Diſſenters, and the *Teſt* for the diſcovery of Diſſenters. Theſe have been looked upon by ſom as the Bulwarks of our ſecurity; and therfore it is not much to be wondred if the diſcourſe of their removal dos alarum thoſe mens mindes. Nevertheleſs if it be conſidered how little ſecurity thoſe things have been unto us, how little reſt they have procured us; nay on the contrary, what diſcontent and murmuring, what conteſts and factions they have raiſed and fomented among us; I ſay, if this be conſidered, methinks the ground of mens preſent apprehenſions ſhould in a great meaſure be taken away. What good is it, in truth, that thoſe Laws have don us? They have not hindred the ſpreading of any fanciful Opinions among the different Sects into which we ar divided. But they have rendred al thoſe Sectaries diſcontented, inclined them to Sedition and Rebellion, and therby made the Government it ſelf

ſelf uneaſy and unſecure. This is plain matter of fact, moſt evidently viſible to every one that dos not wilfully blinde himſelf. Why therfore ſhould any one be alarumed at the change of thoſe Laws which we have experienced to be ſo inſignificant, not to ſay ſo contrary unto the very ends for which they were Eſtabliſhed? And why ſhould not we al much rather rejoyce at the proſpect of this new Experiment of Liberty, which affords more lively hopes of ſtable Comfort? Truly the deſign appears to me ſo plauſible, that I cannot conceiv any thing but *Intereſt* capable to blinde mens mindes in the conſideration of it.

But to that ſuppoſition of mine it may perhaps be here replyed with confidence; That it is indeed *Intereſt* which cauſes the reluctancy we ar ſpeaking of, and that their *Intereſt* being ſuch, it is fitting men ſhould maintain it, and oppoſe al innovations contrary therunto: For this they think ſufficiently authorized by that Fundamental Maxim, of *Salus Populi*, &c. which affirms the Peoples Intereſt to be the ſupremeſt Law.

This Maxim indeed I allow to be unqueſtionably juſt; and if their application of it to this caſe be ſo too, we muſt acknowledg they have reaſon, and joyn with them. But if, on the contrary, the continuance of the *Teſt and Penalties* be only the Intereſt of a very ſmal part of the Nation, and that the general Intereſt of the whole lys in the Liberty now deſigned, then wil the force of their main Artillery be found pointed againſt themſelves, and their Argument eaſily deſtroyed. It is neceſſary therfore to conſider whoſe Intereſt it is to introduce this Liberty, and whoſe to oppoſe it; that we may judg which of the two is the moſt general. But that judgment is ſo eaſy, that no man can be long in ſuſpenſe about it. The whole Body of Diſſenters from the Church of *England*, however ſubdivided and diſtinguiſhed in other things,

things, ar al united & comprehended in that common Cauſe. They have al been ſtraitned, perſecuted and oppreſſed; and therfore nothing can be more natural than for them to deſire Liberty and Eaſe. Now this collective Body of the ſeveral Diſſenters is manifeſtly greater than the Church of *England* alone. But beſides theſe, it is alſo evident that a great part of the Church of *England* it ſelf, I dar boldly ſay the beſt part of it, thoſe Learned and Rational Divines, I mean, who have ſomtimes by opprobry been termed *Latitudinarians*, (tho in truth the word ſound nothing but honorable) Thoſe have always declared themſelvs of moderate Principles, their Intereſt lys alſo evidently in Moderation and Forbearance, becauſe they ar no leſs hated by the ſeverer ſort of their own Brethren than even the Diſſenters themſelvs; and the People that have been influenced by their Doctrin is ſo numerous, that the remaining ſtrict and narrow-ſpirited Church-of-*England*-men, whoſe Intereſt ingages them to maintain their own Priviledges by infringing the juſt Rights of their Neighbours; this remaining number, I ſay, is ſo ſmal in compariſon of the whole Body of the Nation, that it is even ridiculous for them to build their pretences upon the forementioned Maxim, which in effect is directly contrary therunto.

Now if this be ſo indeed, that Liberty of Conſcience is not only the Right of every particular Man, but alſo the general Intereſt of the whole Nation, methinks no Man ought any longer to be aſhamed of, or alarumed at the project of it; but rather every honeſt Man ought to contribute his Endeavours that it may ſucceed.

Yes, may ſom ſay, if it were only Liberty of Conſcience that were pretended to, there could be little objected againſt it: Nay, it muſt be confeſt that the beut of the Nation that way is now ſo ſtrong, that the moſt part would freely enough conſent to the aboliſhing of thoſe Penal Laws which have

have hitherto reſtrained it. But, ſay they, that is not al. Thoſe that deſign the aboliſhing of the Penal Laws, do at the ſame time deſign to take away the Teſt, and therby not onely to permit the Exercíſe of the Roman Catholic Religion, but alſo to admit Roman Catholics into a ſhare of our Government; which, they ad, is a Conſideration wholly of a different Nature from that of meer Liberty of Conſcience, and the Practice wherof would be very unpolitic. This is the Objection that makes the great Cry in this Conjuncture. Thoſe that endeavour to introduce Liberty of Conſcience aim alſo to take away the Teſt: Thoſe that would take away the Teſt ar ſecret if not open Papiſts: And both the one and the other, under pretence of Liberty of Conſcience, ar Betrayers of the tru Libertys and fundamental Laws of their Country. With this Cry many modeſt and honeſt Men ar born down, and ſilenced. And indeed it requires more than ordinary Courage and Strength to bear up againſt ſo impetuous a Torrent. But when all is don, Truth and Reaſon ar able to bear up againſt any thing: And therefore I will now examin impartially whether they be found on the ſide of theſe Objectors, or of the forementioned Patrons of Liberty.

Two things eſpecially ar here to be inquired into. Firſt, whether the Teſt, as it is by Law impoſed upon Roman Catholics, be really an Intrenchment upon the natural and juſt Liberty of their Conſciences, or whether indeed it be a meer political thing of a different Nature, without any Relation therunto. And in the next place, whether the taking away of that Teſt may probably prove advantagious or prejudicial to the general Intereſt of the Nation. Upon theſe two Conſiderations lys the Streſs of this whole Debate.

Now to the firſt, I muſt needs affirm that in my Opinion the impoſing of that Teſt is a thing of a mixt Nature. It is indeed political, becauſe the deſign of it is to exclude the Ro-

man Catholics from public Imployment: But it is alſo Religious, becauſe it makes their Opinion in Religion the Condition of that Excluſion: And therefore it can in no wiſe be ſaid to be of ſo different a Nature from the Liberty of Conſcience we are ſpeaking of, as to have no Relation at al thèrunto. On the contrary, I conceiv not how any one can doubt it to be an infringement of that Liberty. For thoſe Imployments being not hereditary, the way to them is by Nature open to every Man, according as his Capacity and other Circumſtances may fit him for them. Now if a Perſon otherwiſe duly qualified for ſuch an Imployment, which might inable him and his Family to live in Eaſe and Comfort, ſhall by reaſon of ſome Opinion in religious Matters be excluded from that Imployment, and therby expoſed to Penury and Hardſhip; this indeed is not a direct putting that Perſon to Death for that Opinion, but it is a taking away from him that Talent which Nature or Induſtry had given him as a Proviſion for the Comfort of his Life. And can any one now ſay that ſuch a Practice is not a Burden or a Snare to that Mans Conſcience? What real Difference is there, I beſeech you, whether the Laws of the Land do authoriſe a Miniſter of Juſtice to oppreſs and torment a Man for his Opinion, or that they caſt the Man himſelf into ſuch Circumſtances that his own Neceſſities do the ſame thing? Surely there is none at al. It is as clear therfore as Noon day that the impoſing of this Teſt is a ſtraitning of the natural and juſt Liberty of ſuch a Perſons Conſcience. And therfore whoever dos acknowledg in general that Liberty of Conſcience is a Right of Nature and of Chriſtianity, as hath before been hinted, muſt in particular acknowledg that the Teſt is unwarrantable, becauſe it is an evident Infringement therof. Now the far greater Part of the Nation, at this day, ſeeming inclin'd, by that Reaſon, to the aboliſhing of Penal Laws; if they would act conſo-

conſonantly to their own Principles, they ought, for the ſame Reaſon, to deſire the Aboliſhing of the Teſt alſo.

This Point being once gained, that the impoſing of this or any other ſuch like Teſt, in matters of Religion, is an Infringment of our Natural and Chriſtian Liberty, the remaining Conſiderations that ar urged in favor of it, ought not to be of any great weight with upright and honeſt-minded Men. Tho ſom Advantage might be pretended to be found in the doing of it, we ought not for any Advantage to tranſgreſs ſo fundamental a Law. *We muſt not ſin that Grace may abound. We muſt not do Evil that Good may enſue.* Thoſe ar known Precepts; and if they were attended to, this Debate might here be ended. But *Intereſt*, *Intereſt*, is a ſtrange thing. People ar poſſeſt with an Opinion that the admitting of Roman Catholics into a ſhare of our Government is againſt the Intereſt of the Nation: And therefore they ſtill think they ar bound to oppoſe it, *per fas & nefas*. I muſt therfore go on ſtill further, in examining now whether the extending of Liberty of Conſcience ſo far as I have ſhown that it ought to go, *viz.* To the taking away of the Teſt, and by conſequence to the admitting Roman Catholics into publick Offices, be contrary to the general Intereſt of the Nation or no.

That we may judg rightly of this Queſtion, we muſt conſider in what Circumſtances the Nation is now ſcituated, both in reſpect of the *Head* and *Body* of it. *Our Prince is a Catholic*: and we our ſelves ar divided into ſeveral Sects, of which the Catholics ar in number the leaſt conſiderable. The Intereſt of all thoſe Sects, excepting only a ſmal number of rigid and narrow-ſpirited Church of *England* Men, has been already ſhown, to lie in Toleration and Liberty. But there is no reaſon to expect the King ſhould indulge them in that beloved Liberty, unleſs they conſent to allow him the ſame Liberty for thoſe of his own Perſwaſion. Now that Indulgment

and that Conſent do neceſſarily imply the ſame Extent on the one ſide as on the other. The Proteſtant Diſſenters claim a Right to public Imployments: And ſhall not the King demand the ſame Right for Catholic Diſſenters alſo? He may do it ſo much the more reaſonably as the Conformity of their Principles with his may naturally induce him to confide more in their Affection and Fidelity. This being ſo, and the Liberty which we thirſt after not being obtainable at any other Price, who can be ſo unmannerly and ſo il natured as to refuſe unto the King that which they demand of him for themſelves? Or who can be ſo childliſhly humorſom, and ſo deviliſhly malicious, as to refuſe unto themſelvs their own reaſonable and neceſſary Comforts, rather then allow others to enjoy the like? So ſtrange an Extravagance as that can not, certainly, fal into very many Heads. For it being evident by this Conſideration, that al thoſe whoſe Intereſt obliges them to deſire Liberty for themſelvs (which is to ſay the far greater part of the Nation) ar obliged by the ſame Reaſon to allow the ſame Liberty, in its utmoſt extent, unto others: Becauſe their own is not otherwiſe obtainable: I ſay this being ſo, though it may ſeem hard to ſay, yet really it is much harder not to ſuſpect ſom Defect either in the Intellects or Integrity of thoſe that oppoſe it.

But prehaps I ſing of Victory too ſoon. The Oppoſers of that Branch of Liberty which I now plead for, wil be apt to tel me that it is not ſimply upon the account of their Religion that the Roman Catholics ar excluded from any ſhare in our Government; but becauſe their Principles tend to the Oppreſſion of others, and make them reſtleſs until they themſelves become abſolute Maſters. This Objection indeed would have ſom Force if it proceeded from Perſons who were themſelvs innocent of the Crimes they impute unto others: But where

where al are equally Guilty, it may be wondred with what forhead any one can produce it. The plain Truth is, that ever ſince Religion became twiſted with ſecular Intereſt, and the Profeſſion of Divinity became a Trade, al ſides have ſtrove to get uppermoſt; and being ſo, have perſecuted their Fellows. The Invention of new *Creeds* or *Teſts*, and the Perſecution of Diſſenters, is too too ancient. The tru Simplicity of our Saviors and his Apoſtles Doctrin, and the meekneſs of their Spirit, laſted not many Ages: I dar not ſay how few Years. But let us look nearer Home. *Calvin*, the great Inſtitutor of *Presbyterianiſm*, ſhewed the narrowneſs of his Spirit in the Niceneſs of his Theological Syſtem, the Cruelty of his Spirit in the Death of *Servet*; and his Followers have trod faithfully in his Steps, as well by the frequent Superfœtation of their Articles of pretended Orthodoxy, as by their Perſecution of Diſſenters where they have had Power, and by their Reſiſtance even in open War, where they have been abridged of the Privilidges they pretended unto. Shall I inſtance alſo in our Church of *England*? I am loth to diſcover our own Shame. But, alas, it lys already too open, without my Diſcovery. She has perſecuted ever ſince her firſt Eſtabliſhment: And ſom of the Penal Laws then made, ar now the very Subject of this preſent Debate. This Guilt has been Univerſal. And if Jeſus Chriſt ſhould now ſay unto the Partizans of al Sects, as of old unto the Phariſees who accuſed the Woman taken in Adultery, *let him that is Innocent caſt the firſt Stone*, I am perſwaded the Effect would now be the ſame as then; they would *al go away Convicted*. Let not that therfore be urged againſt any one unto which al ar equally obnoxious. An Objection looſes al its Force when it may ſo juſtly be retorted againſt the Objector.

O but, will ſom ſay, *the Caſe is not equal. The Danger is greater from the Roman Catholics than from others, in that the very Prin-*

Principles of their Religion do diſſolve their Obligation to Fidelity, and leave them at liberty to purſu the Advancement of their Church by the Violation of al the moſt ſacred Bonds with which other Men ar tied. For ſhame, let us in the End learn to be more equitable, and not impute unto any Man as a Principle of his Religion that which he utterly diſowns. If there have been Men amongſt them of ſuch pernicious Principles, have there not been ſuch alſo amongſt us? If ſom of their Caſuiſtical Doctors have palliated in ſom Occaſions the Crimes of Treaſon and Rebellion, have not ſom of our zealous Miniſters in other Occaſions incouraged unto the ſame? We want not our Authors that maintain miſchievous Principles, no more than they want theirs: witneſs the Liſt of thoſe condemned not long ago by the *Univerſity of Oxford*. Now will any Presbyterian think he has fair Play ſhown him by thoſe that ſhal impute unto him al the Conſequences which may be drawn from the Writings of *Buchanan*; or a Church of *England* Man from thoſe of *Julian Johnſon*? Crimes are perſonal. And Societies muſt not be condemned for the Miſcariages of particular Perſons. Let every Man then bear his own Burthen. Let us al henceforward ceaſe from criminating others with things wherwith we our ſelves may be ſo juſtly recriminated. Now the ſureſt way to ſtifle theſe Reproaches is by mending the Faults. Wherfore let us now on al ſides ſtudy to reform whatever is amiſs: Let us unanimouſly *renounce the Principle of Perſecution*: and let that be the *only Teſt*, upon which our Government be modelled, as has been already judicially adviſed by another Hand. In doing ſo, there is no Fear but the common Union and Intereſt of al Parties, in a League of mutual Liberty, will be incomparably a better Security for us againſt any particular Uſurper, then our ſeveral Factions have been hitherto one againſt another.

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But ſtil this Anſwer is not direct enough. Thoſe that ar Partys in ſuch a Caſe are ſeldom ſenſible of the Danger wherwith they threaten others, but always intent upon thoſe Dangers wherwith they conceiv that others threaten them. It is not ſufficient therfore to tel them that the Danger on both ſides is mutual. No, they expect that on their Side there ſhould be no Danger at al. Let us endeavor therfore to ſatisfy them in that Point alſo: and then let them ſhew themſelves to be worthy Citizens, by a cheerful Compliance with their own Duty, and our common Intereſt. What can this Danger be that is apprehended by the taking away of the Teſt? That the Papiſts ſhould Lord it over us, and with an open Force extirpate our Religion by the ancient Method of *Fire and Fagot*, or work our Converſion by the' new Mode of *Dragooning*? But that is not rationally to be apprehended from ſo inconſiderable a Number of Men as they ar. Is it ſuppoſed that their Numbers may increaſe, and in the end grow formidable? That Argument ſtrikes more directly againſt the Toleration of their Religion than againſt the aboliſhing of the Teſt: For it is the Toleration alone which will giv them Oppertunity of ſpreading their Doctrins, and laboring to make Proſelites. Wherfore that Argument ought not to be urged by thoſe who acknowledg that Toleration to be a natural Right and a Chriſtian Duty; which certainly moſt Men now do, and al Men ought to do. No, but it wil be ſaid that the Temptation to Popery wil be yet greater, by the open way to advantagious Imployments, when the Teſt ſhal be taken away. But do not thoſe Objectors ſee and conſider the uncertainty of the Continuance of thoſe Advantages, or perhaps even ſome ſtinging Conſequence attending them, under a Proteſtant Succeſſor? Ay certainly they ar not ſo blinde as to be ignorant therof. Experience has ſhown them already the Force of that Antidote in ſom eminent Inſtances, which

may

may assure them that no poisonous Effects, at least no mortal ones, ar now to be apprehended from this guilded Pil of Preferment.

I might here ad many other Considerations to dissipate this panic Fear. As, The Spirit of the Nation, now animated more than ever against Popery. The Interest of the Papists themselves to keep within modest and moderate Bounds, lest too great a stretching after things out of their Reach, should make them lose their present Footing. And, not improperly, The *Word of a King*, who has solemnly promised us that he will not suffer any Man to be oppressed in the just Liberty of his Conscience: *Of a King*, I say, who dos not now first begin to affect that Language, but who has been long known to assert the same Principle: *Of a King*, who values himself more upon his Integrity and Faithfulness than upon all the Glories and Advantages of his Crown: And *of a King*, in fine, whose Interest as wel as Honour obliges him to keep his Word. These ar al Considerations of weight. But after a Demonstration of the Impossibility that the Roman Catholics should arrive to that Strength as to be able to hurt us, (tho we suppose them to be never so willing) it is superfluous to inlarge upon Topics of a weaker Nature. That which cannot happen in humane Probability, need not be feared in humane Conduct, nor ought it to be objected in humane Consultations.

I wil therefore here stop the Course of these Reflections; which I must acknowledg do now seem unto me strong enough to dissipate those Fears which your Prudence first instilled into my Minde, and to incourage an honest Heart to go on streight forwards, as Providence shall enable him, in the present Work of this Day, notwithstanding any Opposition or Reproach that may attend it. The thing in it self is good. And therfore I declare to you, that I will no longer be

ashamed

aſhamed or afraid to ſhew my Approbation of it, and to diſpoſe others, as I may be able, unto the ſame Sentiments. I ought indeed, in good Manners, to have expected your Judgment, before I made ſo expreſs a Declaration of my own. But I know your Honeſty too wel to doubt of your Concurrence herein, and your Friendſhip too wel to fear any hard Cenſure for my tranſgreſſing thoſe little Rules of formal Decency. Let us both of us put our Hands to the Work, in Gods Name, in the Sphere where we are placed. And to begin the Attempt, if you judg that theſe Reflections of mine may be in any degree uſeful unto the Public, I giv you free Liberty to diſperſe them as you think convenient. But that Permiſſion ingages me to ad yet a few Words more; which ar not indeed much needful to your ſelf, but may perhaps not be unuſeful to others.

In peruſing what I have writ, I cannot but ſuſpect that a Prejudice may ariſe againſt me in ſome Mens Mindes, from the Diſintereſſedneſs I have ſhewn in reſpect of the different Sects of Proteſtants; as if I were my ſelf a Papiſt, and deſigned wholly to favorize that Party. To obviate that Prejudice, I therfore deſire the World may know that I am ſo far from being ingaged in any Party, that I ſincerely deſire the Diſtinctions of all Parties may be obliterated amongſt Mankind, and that *al the Ends of the Earth may be brought into Subjection and Obedience unto the Goſpel of the Holy Jeſus*, and own no other Name or Profeſſion but that of Chriſtianity. Oh what glorious Days, Oh what tranſporting Comforts, and ſolid Happineſs, would that Temper of Spirit bring into the World! Then would the Root of Contention be cut up, when al Men were engaged in the ſame Cauſe. Diſputes would ſurely ceaſe, when Men came to know that the Religion which Jeſus Chriſt came to inſtitute upon Earth, conſiſts not in any airy Speculations, nor ſhadowy Ceremonys, but wholly

and ſolely in actual Obedience to his Holy Precepts. They would then eaſily infer, from ſuch a Foundation, that Notions and Doctrins, and much more outward Cults, ar only ſo far neceſſary unto Salvation as they ar proper to influence Mens Lives. They would then know that *the Grace of God which bringeth Salvation hath appeared unto al Men*; and that therfore it doth not ly hid in Difficultys and Obſcuritys, which few or none do comprehend; but that the Rules it preſcribes us ar plain, even to the meaneſt Capacitys, *teaching us, that denying Ungodlineſs and worldly Luſts, we ſhould liv ſoberly, righteouſly, and Godlily in this preſent World.* This would make al Men more intent upon their Duty, upon the ſtrict Obſervance of the Rules of Juſtice, of Truth, and of *univerſal Charity and Good-wil towards one another*, which is the choiceſt Flower in al the Garland of Chriſtian Vertues. And in the ſame Proportion as thoſe Vertues increaſed, ſtil further Knowledg, and a ſound Judgment in Divine Truths would increaſe with them; and the Seeds of Diſcord would at the ſame time be deſtroyed. We ſhould then *turn our Swords into Plow-ſhares, and our Spears into Pruning-hooks; we ſhould not learn War any more, but reſt Fearleſs under our own Vines, and our own Fig-trees, and every Man walking in the Name of his God.* Princes would not then preſs Uniformity in things of ſmal Conſequence, with a Violence only tolerable in Occaſions of the moſt fundamental and greateſt Importance: Subjects would not refuſe Conformity in things indifferent, with a Headſtrongneſs only excuſable in Points moſt eſſential: Nor would either the one or the other miſtake thoſe *fundamental and eſſential Points*, when al were agreed that they conſiſted only in *Piety, Sobriety, and Vertu.* An Authority tempered with Sweetneſs, and a Subjection mixed with Lov, would make al Eſtates of Men as happy as our frail Condition of Mortality can admit.

This

This Thought, you ſee, has a little warmed me; and no wonder it ſhould: For indeed it is the only Fire that heats my Zeal, the only Spring that gives Motion to my ſluggiſh and indifferent Temper. God grant that it may kindle ſom Meaſures of a like Flame, nay a higher Meaſure, I beſeech him, in thoſe that read it. Then ſhould I hope daily to ſee more and more conſiderable Advancements in the Work that Providence ſeems to be now acting in the World. Shal I explain my Meaning? Why not? I am ſure it tends not to the Injury of any Man, and therfore it can not be reputed Criminal. Wel, 'tis this. The Perſecution we have heard of in *France*, I am wel informed, has inſpir'd a ſtrange Spirit of Reformation into the Romiſh Clergy themſelvs: They acknowledg the Abuſes that ar in their Church, as far as ever its outward Oeconomy and public Authority wil admit: They preach openly at *Paris* againſt al manner of Superſtition and Idolatry: They inſtruct their Auditors in a ſpiritual Adoration of the ſupreme Deity: They do not rack the Conſciences of their Penitents with any ſtrict Determination in Points incomprehenſible, but they turn them wholly to the Eſſential Dutys of Life: And in this Manner they endeavor to produce and maintain *Unity* between themſelvs and their *New Converts*, as they cal them, *in the Bond of Peace*. This appears to me an *Antiperiſtaſis* to the Deſigns of the Authors of that Perſecution; a Rebound guided by Providence, which produces a far different Effect from the direct Blow. But this is not al. We have heard of ſomthing like it in *Italy*, and in *Spain*; which has already made ſom Noiſe, and a very conſiderable Progreſs in thoſe Countrys. Perhaps indeed theſe things may be cenſured by ſom Doctors of that Communion, who ar as much wedded to their old-faſhioned Popery as the narrower ſort of Church-of-England-Men (amongſt Proteſtants) ar wedded to their liturgical Rites and Ceremonys.

ays. But however it is one Step, nay a great Advancement, towards a general inlightning of Mens Minds in tru Religion; which I ſtrongly hope wil be conducted by Providence to a happy Iſſu. And as I contemplate the Proſpect of our Engliſh Liberty, as a Diſpenſation of Gods own Direction, extended unto us by a Hand from whence we leaſt expected it; as an Inſtrument more exactly fitted by him for the Atchievment of this great Work than thoſe others aforementioned; ſo I heartily wiſh that al tru-hearted Engliſhmen would put their Hands unto this Work; that we may be al found *diligent Laborers in the Vineyard where we ar placed, faithful Servants in the Improvement of the Talent committed unto us, and by no means barren and unfruitful in the Knowledg of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*, unto which we have ſo much pretended.

Pardon, I intreat you, this Excurſion. It is now time for me to return to my firſt Theme, and draw towards a Concluſion of this tedious Letter. Thoſe that read it with unprejudiced Eys wil eaſily diſcern that I write it not to ſerve the Intereſt of any one Party, further than that Intereſt tends to the general Good: And that I deſpiſe the Cenſures of al Partys, in compariſon to the Satisfaction I propound unto my ſelf in contributing towards that Good. My Rule is ſtreight. Let others make theirs ſo too, and we ſhal al infallibly arrive at that happy Reſt which we al breath after. I wil ſum up what I have ſaid, or ſupply what I have omitted, in a few Words. Liberty of Conſcience is the natural Right of Mankind, and the general Intereſt of *England*. Penal Laws and Teſts ar direct Infringements of that Right, and they tend evidently to the ruin of that Intereſt. Wil we therfore acquit our ſelves like honeſt and prudent Men, let us ſettle our ſelves in that our natural Priviledg, and let us aboliſh every thing that is oppoſite therunto. Let us aboliſh thoſe things, I ſay, we that ar private Perſons, in

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perſwading every Man his Neighbor to that Diſpoſition: And when we ſhal be called to it, let us elect ſuch Members to ſerv in Parliament as ſhal be diſpoſed to conſent unto the aboliſhing of them by Law. That is the ſureſt Means to ingage the King unto us, and to ingage us al unto one another. His Government wil be ſo much the more eaſy as he finds his People the more compliant with his juſt Deſires. And our Security wil be ſo much the greater, nay it wil be intire, when our Propertys, our Libertys, and our Religion, ſhal be defended by the common Union of al Partys againſt our onely public Enemies, al turbulent and ambitious Innovators.

I am,

Dear Sir,

Yours, *&c.*

FINIS.